

WARRIOR BOYZ

STUDY GUIDE

A CO-PRODUCTION OF VIVAMANTRA FILMS
AND THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA
IN ASSOCIATION WITH CANWEST MEDIA



INTRODUCTION

Parents, educators, law enforcement agencies and youth themselves are often confronted with the same questions: Why do youth get involved in gang violence? What function does violence or joining gangs serve? How do youth themselves rationalize their involvement?

In this documentary, *Warrior Boyz*, we meet Jagdeep, a Grade 10 drop-out and ex-con who carries the reminders of his gang experience mapped across his body in the form of bullet wounds and machete scars. A steady pattern of escalation pulled him deeper into the criminal underworld until, he says, “I guarantee it... I was gonna be dead.” His experience is a stark rejoinder to 15-year-old Tanvir, a slender teenager whose life is a free fall of violence and alienation. Eighteen-year-old Vicky, who is struggling to graduate from high school, refuses to even talk about his past for fear of retaliation. This film focuses on the experience of two young men and the people who are fighting to help them resist the deadly lure of gangs.

While this guide is designed to be used by parents, educators, law enforcement agencies, and other professionals working with youth, those that use *Warrior Boyz* and this study guide can help educators, parents and youth aged 13+ years learn to:

- Understand the connections between youth, gangs, bullying and alienation.
- Understand why youth join gangs.
- Understand the role of violence in gangs.
- Broaden the scope of questions raised about youth and gangs using ideas from social studies, sociology, criminology, child development, parenting and psychology.
- Address issues from a multicultural lens with a focus on ethnic identity and racism, which seem to compound the problems of gang violence.
- Encourage educators, parents and youth to think outside the box and provide creative solutions.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

The guide is organized into two sections: The first section addresses various issues and themes to engage the students in an informed dialogue to address the Why questions about violence and gangs. This section also involves examining how the youth in the film discuss violence and what it means to them. Other exercises serve to illustrate the diverse perspectives of the characters in the film about violence, highlighting the complex nature of this phenomenon.

The second section is focused on solutions by having students think about the consequences of gang violence and the need for creative solutions on individual and structural levels. This section explores what educators, law enforcement agents, youth and parents can do.

WARNING: Some of the film may be shocking to viewers. Characters are honest and blunt while expressing their views and recounting their experiences with gang violence. Also, the short clips

from the Vancouver Police in their presentation to a classroom include slides of murdered gang members and may be visually disturbing to some.

Individuals presenting the film should be mindful of this warning and be ready to deal with various reactions and questions from the viewers, which can range from indifference to shock, fear and hope.

PRE-SCREENING DISCUSSION

Before showing the film, prepare the viewers with these questions:

- What role does violence play in people's lives?
- Do you know anyone who has been involved in an act of violence, either as perpetrator or victim? How did you make sense of this? What impact has it had on you? How has this shaped your perceptions of violence?
- What profile comes to mind when you think of a gang member?
- Think about gender, age, social class, ethnicity and family.
- What has influenced your views about who joins gangs and why?
(Think about pop culture, also.)

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION THEMES

After showing the film, discuss the following themes:

1) THEME: JOINING A YOUTH GANG

There are multiple factors in why someone joins a youth gang. The person's age or stage in life, for example, is key. Think about adolescence and the needs of this age group. If we reflect on these questions, we are better placed to probe the Whys of gang violence:

- Why might joining gangs be attractive to youth?
- What makes youth more vulnerable to being lured into such an underworld?

These questions are a good lead to a second theme, which is the function gang violence may play according to the youth in the film.

- Ask a general question about why youth might join gangs.
- Then narrow down the focus to each character: Jagdeep, Vicky and Tanvir? Are there underlying differences? Compare.
- Consider the following quote from Jag: "I started like almost any gang-involved person, as a wannabe." What message is he conveying?

2) THEME: VIOLENCE AND GANGS

Hearing diverse perspectives from youth on the subject of gangs and violence can assist youth and educators in both achieving a greater understanding of how youth rationalize and make sense of violent behaviour, and deciding how youth can be supported to make the right choices.

- Pose this question considering each of the three characters in the film: What function does violent behaviour serve in gangs?
- Discuss these comments from the film:

Vicky: "Kids fight . . . we had a hard life. People would break our windows and make fun of you and stuff."

Tanvir talks about getting into fights: "To get respect, don't run away . . . that is how you get respect."

- Discuss the role of respect and revenge.
- What are the dangers of some of these perceptions of violence?
- How have the perceptions of the youth added to your understanding of the function and motives behind violence?
- What are your views about the perspectives of counsellors, educators, parents, youth or law enforcement agents?

3) THEME: PERCEPTIONS OF VIOLENCE

How aware are the youth in the film about the consequences of violence, on themselves and those around them? Consider personal safety, the well-being of friends and family future prospects.

Below are quotes to help facilitate the discussion:

- Vicky: "My mom always gets scared thinking I did something and they are coming to get me. She hears sirens, thinking . . . what if that is my kid that's involved? She is always worried."
- Vicki continues: "Seeing my parents in pain is like the worst thing in the world."
- Jagdeep: "When you look back about the things you did, it kind of all looks stupid, that there is kind of no point in fighting. Why did you fight? You end up beating a kid up for nothing."
- Tanvir: "If I am in trouble, I would go to my baseball bat."
- What do the perceptions of Jagdeep, Tanvir and Vicky tell you? Are they aware of the consequences of violence? Substantiate your views with examples from the film.
- How can exposing the consequences help youth to think twice before getting involved?

4) THEME: ROOT CAUSES AND FINDING CONNECTIONS:
ETHNIC IDENTITY, INTER-CULTURAL CHALLENGES AND RACISM

Canada is a multicultural society, where individuals have the freedom to express their cultural identity. Although some youth enjoy participating in several participating in several “worlds,” other young people struggle and find themselves trapped in a double life of tradition and Western values. This juggling act may result in feelings of alienation due to a disconnect between themselves, their parents and society at large.

- What did the youth in the film have to say about these issues?
- How might joining a gang help somebody achieve a sense of belonging?
- Consider the remarks of Vice-principal Mr. Rai, who spoke about youth losing their culture and “looking for connections in the wrong area.”

Some of the youth spoke about racism.

Discuss the following:

- Jagdeep speaks of racism: “Gang involvement was a way to assert ourselves, this everyday constant process of systemic racism . . . overt racism every single day.”
- Jagdeep: “I remember feeling ashamed of who I was.” He spoke about people saying “Go home you ----- Hindu.”
- Tanvir talks about his Punjabi ethnic identity and says he has greater freedom in Surrey to express his Indian heritage. What does he mean when he says: “Over here, stores are Punjabi...at least they don’t treat us like thieves and stuff...they treat us as normal.”
- What is the link between feeling disconnected and gang violence?
- What role does peer pressure play? Are youth who are more vulnerable more susceptible to peer pressure? Give examples from the film.
- How can youth resist peer pressure to engage in gang violence to gain respect or acceptance and to deal with conflict?
- What efforts can schools, peers and parents make to deal with feelings of cultural alienation?

5) THEME: STEREOTYPES

A stereotype can be defined as generalizations made about a particular group of people.

Discuss the following:

- Examine existing stereotypes of individuals involved in gang violence. Consider the role of family, peers and media. Discuss how these portrayals influence perceptions, attitudes and actions towards certain ethnic groups.
- How might these stereotypes influence the targeted group? What are the implications of

stereotyping and generalizing gang violence to a particular ethnic group on individual and social levels? Make reference to scenes from the film.

- Consider issues of: Eroding self esteem, elevation of frustration and alienation? What impact can this have on the individual and in group dynamics?
- How can the subject of gang violence from this film relate to someone of the same age, background gender but of a different “ethnic” group. It is important to note that gang-violence transcends “all” ethnic groups.

6) THEME: DECONSTRUCTING GANG LIFE

It is important to understand and deconstruct the glorified representations of gang violence.

Discuss the following:

- Do the youth in the film glorify gang violence and the lifestyle? Provide examples.
- What is attractive about gang violence and how can the media help create false myths?
- Discuss the following quote from Mr. Rai: “The line between TV and reality just become blurred.”
- How can seeing the truth behind gang violence and the baits used to lure youth into gang activity prevent youth from joining?

7) THEME: BEING PART OF THE SOLUTION – EDUCATORS, PARENTS AND PEERS

Educators and parents can discuss the following:

- What needs to be done to help youth make the right choices?
- How can exposing the consequences of joining gangs help youth say no?
- What is being done to tackle this problem in the film? Draw on:
 - Role of the educator: Inviting youth (especially those who are walking a slippery slope) to watch anti-gang presentations.
 - What message do the police convey?
 - Consider the scene in the film where Vancouver constable Doug Spencer and Adam Dhaliwal address high school students. They speak about the needless deaths, attending over 70 funerals and their concern over how kids “get hooked onto this gangster life style the way they see it on TV.”
 - What should parents do?

Youth can discuss the following:

- Jagdeep speaks openly about his gang experience at a high school. He says: “The notion that people are pressured into joining gangs, I don’t buy it. I am going to give you a straight answer... I looked for it, I chased it, and I went for it.” Discuss his message.

- After graduating, Vicky gives Mr. Rai a card with these words: “Thanks for giving me a chance. There are not many people that take a chance and bend over backwards without ever knowing you. You are one the few role models in my life that taught me many life’s lessons every time I spoke to you. You inspire me.” Consider how Mr. Rai’s presence helped Vicky.

Reflect upon the following approaches to preventing gang violence:

- Identifying high-risk youth early.
- Being creative in how messages are conveyed to youth (think about the presentation by Vancouver police).
- Being there for the youth and taking time to listen (giving them a sense of belonging can reduce feelings of alienation).
- Getting them involved in activities to channel their energy in positive ways. (Some educators believe that joining a sports team can take on similar functions of a gang by providing team work, building connections and forming an identity.) Consider this quote from a parent in the film: “Parents, spend time with your kid.”

FURTHER DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

Suggested Role Playing Activities:

- What do you do when a youth says he has to fight to get respect?
- A friend or youth is tempted to get involved with gang life. What do you say?
- A friend who has been subject to consistent bullying is fed up and says that he is joining a gang to get greater “muscle” to fight back. What do you say? What do you do?

The following questions can help further the discussions or be used as essay topics.

- According to the film, how do schools intervene and deal with vulnerable youth?
- What support is necessary for youth to feel a sense of belonging and connection in order to stay on the right path? Draw on examples from the film.
- What have you learned from the documentary about the factors that can lure youth into the underworld of gangs and violence? (Consider gang culture, toughness, wealth, respect, sense of belonging, identity and alienation.)
- What do you think parents and schools need to do to prevent and or deal with youth gang violence?
- Consider this quote: “When you are a spectator, you are part of the problem.” What can youth do to become part of the solution?
- What key strategies have you learned that might help youth make the right choices? Select three root causes, identify the link between the root problem and gang violence, and then propose a strategy.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

South Asian Community Coalition Against Youth Violence

www.saccayv.com
604-275-8977

BC Crime Prevention Association

604-291-9959
info@bccpa.org

Integrated Gang Task Force

Shinder Kirk
Shinder.Kirk@rcmp-grc.gc.ca

Vancouver Police Department

Anti-gang education presentation: “The truth behind gangs”
Detective: Constable Doug Spencer
doug.spencer@vpd.ca

Constable Adam Dhaliwal

adam.dhaliwal@vpd.ca

Virsa: Sikh Alliance Against Youth Violence

778-578-0620
info@virsa.ca
www.virsa.ca

MOSAIC

604-254-9626
mosaic@mosaicbc.com

Group of 10 Report

604-309-6684
kashmirb@hotmail.com

**Unified Network of Indo Canadians for Togetherness through
Education and Discussion (UNITED-PICS)**

604-789-2486

Provincial Youth Services

Ministry of Children and Family Development
250-387-1328
www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth/resources

Youth Justice BC

info@youthjusticebc.ca

www.youthjusticebc.ca

Youth in BC

www.youthinbc.com

Bullying Canada

Web: www.bullyingcanada.ca

BC Institute Against Family Violence

604-669-7055

www.bcifv.org

resource@bcifv.org

The National Film Board of Canada

www.nfb.ca

CitizenShift

www.citizenshift.nfb.ca/gangs

STUDY GUIDE CREDITS

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This study guide was written by Indira Prahst, a sociology instructor at Langara College, in Vancouver, British Columbia. Prahst has devoted much of her time to deconstructing the glorified myths of gang life after losing some of her own students to gang violence. Her hope that at-risk youth can make the right choices comes from Jagdeep, a former college student and one of the characters in this documentary.

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